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ABSTRACT

Life goals of current college freshmen that are important in planning college programs are considered in this keynote address. Based on results of Carnegie Foundation Student Surveys, information is presented for 1969, 1975, and 1985 on students' optimism/pessimism about college and the future, views about job chances and money, objectives for attending college, attitudes about curriculum reform, and participation in college governance. Students have anxiety about job prospects and are concerned with life's material rewards. They are pleased with the ways colleges are helping them achieve their goals and do not favor curriculum reforms. It is suggested that current students need a college education that provides: (1) skills and knowledge needed to live in the world, (2) hope in the face of fears about jobs and nuclear war, (3) a sense of responsibility in the face of "me-orientation," and (4) a feeling of efficacy. Teaching hope is advocated as part of the freshman curriculum: general education can be seen as the study of humankind's collective hopes and dreams. Colleges are invited to give students a stronger sense of connection with the larger world and a deeper spirit of commitment, even obligation, to others. In response to students' feelings that their acts will not matter, internships and other experiences can show them how they can make a difference. (SW)

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HEARTS AND MINDS
The Freshman Challenge

by Arthur E. Levine

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On February 16, 1986, Arthur E. Levine, president of Bradford College, presented the keynote address at the National Conference on the Freshman Year Experience. The text of that address follows.

Not long ago, a faculty member at Bradford College was talking to her students. She said every generation has shared events that bind them. For the generation born after World War I, there was the depression. For the youngsters born a little later, there was Pearl Harbor and the death of FDR. She said for our generation, it is the death of John Kennedy. She said we all know where we were when we heard the news. She asked the class, where were you? They looked at her. She looked at them. Silence. Finally, a young woman in the back said, "we weren't born yet."

Today's college freshmen were born in 1967. They were born after the new frontier ended. They were a year old when Lyndon Johnson's great society, Martin Luther King, and Robert Kennedy died. They were two when men landed on the moon. They were six when the Vietnam War ended. They were seven when Watergate reached its painful conclusion. The dominant events in our lives are at best history to them. The emotions they stir in us—optimism, hope, triumph, anger, pain, sadness—do not stir for them.

This generation knows two presidents: Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan. They know about a turbulent economy and a tough job market. They know about international tensions, terrorism, and the threat of nuclear war. They think things were bad during the Carter years, and that they are better now.

A few years ago, in contrasting the students of the 1960's with the students of the late 70's, I pointed to a decline of optimism. I called it a "Titanic Ethic"—students shared a sense that the ship, call it the U.S. or the world, was going to sink. Forced to ride on a doomed vessel, students had decided to go first class, seeking all the goodies to make the voyage as luxurious as possible for as long as the ship was still afloat.

In recent years, there have been important changes, though the Titanic imagery remains accurate. Current students are somewhat less pessimistic than their predecessors. They are also more satisfied with the world they live in. (Table 1).

One area in which anxiety remains high is the job market. Three out of four students continue to worry about their job prospects. Two out of five would still take the same job now as after

TABLE 1
Satisfaction

	1969	1975	1985
Apprehensive about the future	—	76%	60%
Political system is working well	—	39%	58%
Satisfied with college	66%	71%	79%

Source: Carnegie Foundation Student Surveys

TABLE 2
College and Jobs

	1975	1985
Worry about job prospects	76%	75%
If I could get same job now as after graduation, I would take it now	38%	41%
If college was not helping my job chances, I would drop out	45%	41%
The chief benefit of a college education is increasing your earning power	46%	51%

Source: Carnegie Foundation Student Surveys

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TABLE 3
Attitudes About Money

	1969-70	1975	1984
Essential or very important to be very well off financially	48%	67%	77%

Source: Carnegie Foundation Student Surveys and UCLA Higher Education Research Institute Study of College Freshmen

TABLE 4
What Do You Want From College

	1969	1975	1984
Detailed grasp of a specialized field	62%	68%	74%
Training and skills for a job	59%	67%	75%
Get along with people	76%	66%	56%
Formulate goals & values for life	71%	62%	59%

Source: Carnegie Foundation Student Surveys

graduation, or leave college if it was not helping their job chances. Their estimate of the value of a college degree has not changed (Table 2).

Work-world anxiety is matched by an increasing concern with obtaining the material rewards of life. More than three out of four college students say it is essential or very important not to be *well* off financially, but to be *very* well off financially (Table 3). At Bradford we have an event each year called Freshman Inquiry in which all students are asked to write an essay on their future plans, freshman experience, doubts, questions, and hopes, then to meet with a faculty, student, and administrative panel to discuss plans. One young woman wrote that after college she wanted to be the C.E.O. of a multinational corporation, a U.S. senator, head of a foundation that gave scholarships to higher education, and work for nuclear arms control.

I asked what she needed from college to achieve these goals. She said a killer instinct. I talked to her about social responsibility. No response. I inquired about nuclear arms control, thinking I'd found the chink in her armor. She dismissed my point by saying, "If there is a nuclear war I'm not going to get to run a multinational corporation, am I?" Another student at a midwestern college put it far more simply. She said, "Money is nice, poor is not nice, and I want nice."

Student life goals have a profound impact on what undergraduates want from college. It is significant in planning our programs that social and personal commitments continue to decline while job interests rise even further. You can see the results of this on campuses when you look at enrollment patterns and choices of majors. Are we accommodating them? In surveys, students express pleasure with the ways colleges are helping them achieve their goals (Table 4). They do not want the most often discussed curriculum reforms of recent years (Table 5). Nor are they eager to participate in institutional governance. However, despite these trends, there has been a slight decline in student sense of powerlessness (Table 6).

Perhaps the best explanation comes from students themselves. They say they are more conservative. In the 1960's, 81% of American students characterized themselves as middle of the road to liberal. Today middle of the road to conservative accounts for 76% of students. Yet some of their attitudes belie this trend. They increasingly favor typically liberal issues such as women's rights and oppose conservative planks such as the death penalty (Table 7).

One suspects that what they are actually saying is that they have been through a lot of change and simply want stability. They want a chance to achieve their personal dreams.

A Special Generation

What it all boils down to is this: today's students are a special generation, like every one before them. They are no better and no worse than their predecessors. They are only different. And, I believe, what they need is a college education with four distinctive characteristics.

1) *It must provide the skills and knowledge needed to live in our world.* We all have our own lists of what this means. Mine includes: education that teaches basic skills—the fundamental languages (words and numbers) that all human beings use to communicate; education that stresses issues of values and questions of ethics—for a pragmatic and materialistic generation, this is essential; education that prepares students for what they see is a frightening and, indeed, difficult, job market; and

TABLE 5
Reforming the Curriculum

	1969	1975	1985
Undergraduate education would be better if:			
All courses were elective	53%	35%	19%
Grades were abolished	57%	32%	16%
It were less specialized and more general education	40%	31%	29.6%
There was a one year service requirement	48%	36%	29.7%
Curriculum suffers from specialization	—	34%	23%
College is irrelevant to the world	42%	29%	19.9%

Source: Carnegie Foundation Student Surveys

education that teaches the 3 C's—critical thinking, creativity, and continuous learning.

This is a start. It's a curriculum that should begin during the first weeks of college. But, even so, students need *more* out of their college education.

2) *It must provide hope.*

Today's students lack hope. They are more satisfied than they are hopeful. More than one-third of today's students expect a nuclear war in this lifetime. (Carnegie Student Surveys)

Hope is the stuff they need to build a better tomorrow. Hope is the stuff that gives meaning to education. It should permeate every aspect of an institution of higher learning.

I am not talking about a rosey-eyed, pollyannish view of the world. I am talking about the vision and promise that make it possible to challenge every tomorrow.

TABLE 6
Students and Governance

	1969	1975	1985
Role of Undergraduates in Governance: (Control or Voting)			
Bachelors degree requirement	29%	25%	18%
Provision to influence content of courses	42%	32%	24%
Residence halls	77%	70%	55%
Student discipline	73%	64%	48%
Usually vote in student elections	—	44.1%	38.6%
Individual can do little to change society	51%	45%	41.8%

Source: Carnegie Foundation Student Surveys

- The teaching of hope ought to be part of our freshman recruiting materials.
- The teaching of hope ought to be the focus of orientation. It is more important than the myriads of trivia usually served up in such affairs.
- It ought to be part of the freshman curriculum. If you think about it, general education is the study of humankind's collective hopes and dreams.
- The teaching of hope ought to

About the National Conference on the Freshman Year Experience

Since 1972, the University of South Carolina at Columbia has offered a special course for freshmen called University 101: The Student in the University. University 101 is of a genre known as freshman seminars or freshman orientation courses.

Through the 1970s, the University received hundreds of requests for information on how to develop similar courses, with inquirers often asking how to enhance freshmen retention. It became apparent that a convening of interested colleagues would be of value.

In 1982, 175 educators gathered at the University to discuss the history, organization, administration, politics, and content of freshman seminar/orientation courses. Participants felt that not only should such meetings be continued, but that their focus should expand to include broader questions about the freshman experience. In 1983, then, a "National Conference on the Freshman Year Experience" was held; 350 people attended.

Thanks to the leadership and dedication of John N. Gardner, director of the University 101 program, the 1984 and 1985 conferences continued to grow in size and value to people. The 1986 conference, held this past February, drew to South Carolina over 1000 individuals from the U.S., Canada, England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Egypt. Over 180 sessions, workshops, and other presentations featured ideas for strengthening and broadening freshman programs in all types of institutions.

Given rising interest in the topic, the University plans a National Conference East (again at the University of South Carolina at Columbia) and West (cosponsored by and held at the University of California at Irvine) for 1987.

In addition, the University is organizing three international conferences to be held in Great Britain during the summers of 1986, 1987, and 1988. Their purpose is to explore cross-cultural similarities and differences in promoting successful assimilation of freshmen into the college environment to assure higher graduation rates. Proposals have been accepted for the 1986 summer conference from educators in Holland, West Germany, Poland, South Africa, Australia, Hong Kong, Canada, the U.K., and the U.S.

Another outgrowth of the University's Freshman Year Experience activities in the international arena is the annual Summer Institute on Freshman Studies, cosponsored by the University of Prince Edward Island in Canada. As a result of these summer institutes (in operation since 1984), the University 101 concept has been adopted by numerous Canadian postsecondary institutions.

For more information on Freshman Year Experience conferences and concepts, write John N. Gardner, Director, University 101, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC 29208.

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TABLE 7
Political Attitudes

	1969	1975	1985
Political Orientation:			
Left to liberal	44%	36%	24%
Middle of road	37%	39%	37%
Conservative	19%	26%	38%
Capital punishment should be abolished	—	36%	41%
Only volunteers in Army	65%	70%	48%
Women given preference with men of equal ability and qualities	—	26%	41%
Private corporations too concerned with profits, not enough with responsibility	—	79%	76%
Too much concern with minority rights, not enough with responsibility	54%	60%	56%

Source: Carnegie Foundation Student Surveys

confront the fears that our students face. Exercises like Bradford's Freshman Inquiry are an excellent vehicle.

- In the same manner, the teaching of hope ought to respond to the deep anxiety students feel about jobs. Career counseling, in the broadest sense of the term, ought to begin early in the freshman year.

3) *It must give a sense of responsibility.*

Today's students are Me-oriented. Individual isolation and self-concern are outstanding characteristics of this generation.

"Meism" is a periodic event common to all communities. It separates people. In the extreme, it robs them of their ability to see common problems and to work together for common solutions. The problems grow worse and the people come to feel victimized, viewing the problems as a form of personal harassment. Their feeling of impotence grows and apathy increases. All in all, it is the classic prescription for poisoning a democratic society.

College needs to give students a stronger sense of connection with the larger world and a deeper spirit of commitment, even obligation, to others.

We can, of course, use the curriculum to teach these lessons. Student group projects and other cooperative pedagogies can work well. But the co-curriculum offers even more opportunities—in residential life; in service projects; in scholarships that include service as a requirement; in speaker series and convocations; in awards and honors for service. Such activities need to begin in the freshman year if they are to be effective.

4) *It must give students a feeling of efficacy.*

Not long ago I was talking to a group of college seniors in a leadership program at one of the more selective liberal arts colleges in the country. They were the cream of the cream. They had been chosen for grooming for Rhodes, Danforth, and Truman Scholarships. I was asked to talk about the challenges of leadership.

It quickly became apparent that the group was not interested in becoming leaders. I asked why. After a long meandering conversation, in which I felt like I spoke a foreign language, one young man said, "Life is short. Why would we want to do that? What difference would it make?" A quick vote followed—27 of the 30 students agreed with him.

Students feel less impotent today than in the past. But the sense of impotence persists. It is less apparent today because the desire to participate and the hope for change have also diminished. Today's students need to know that their acts matter.

> *"Students say they are more conservative. Yet some of their attitudes belie this trend. They increasingly favor typically liberal issues such as women's rights and oppose conservative planks such as the death penalty."*

Once again, let us use the curriculum to show them how people can make a difference. But let us also provide experiences that teach them that they can make a difference through, for example, internships, leadership training, field study, and campus governance and activities.

Above all, we must use every facility at our disposal—both what we say and do—to convince students that they are the future. For ill or for good, no matter what it is they choose to do, their acts and deeds will make a difference, perhaps not in the sense of molding public policy—though members of this generation will—but much more fundamentally in terms of the many lives every one of them will touch.

Tell them—If you want to be a doctor, don't do it just for the money. Tomorrow requires doctors who want to cure the sick and help to heal a pained nation.

Tell them—You can make a difference.

Tell them—If you want to be a lawyer, don't do it for the status. Tomorrow requires lawyers who will assist those in need and who will work to make our laws reflect what is right and good.

Tell them—You can make a difference.

Tell them—If you want to be a business leader, don't do it for the power. Tomorrow requires leaders and followers who care deeply about our shared future.

Making that difference is their birthright. They must not trade it for trinkets. Tomorrow requires hope and responsibility. Ask them, "Please be the people who will make that commitment. No one else can."

That's the challenge and that's the promise. The freshman year is the key. It is the best chance we have to touch the hearts and minds of our students. For many students, it is our only chance. ■